

from the adults. And, somewhere out there, was a large tor-o-don band, males and females alike rooting all day long for their diet of seeds and ground nuts.

The tor-o-don didn't always stick together, that much was common knowledge. After huddling for the night, the males would split up, each going off to forage with his little band of females and children. And, sometimes, the females and their children would wander away from that male-led family and forage for themselves. It made Om-at remember yesterday's female, standing there, pendulous breasts swinging, water droplets on her mustache and beard, legs spread in a carefully balanced stance, fists raised.

If Ta-den hadn't been there to take the infant, the female would have fought him, just like a waz-ho-don female. But he was bigger than a tor-o-don female and probably could have beaten her. Interesting thought, circling around several times before being dismissed as irrelevant.

By mid-morning, with the sun bright and hot overhead, the sky burned clear, Om-at and Ta-den paused to drink from the stream, filling their bellies with cold water, then dropping down to rest in the shade of a low, spreading thorn tree. There was a bush nearby with bright red flowers, what females usually called a "scare flower," and Om-at stared at it, eyes slitted against the sunlight, watching a few black and yellow bees drone about, foraging for their hive.

There was a thought. Raid the hive and get some honey. It wasn't meat, but a wad of honeycomb would do as a guest-gift. He tapped Ta-den and pointed at the bush. "Bees."

Ta-den looked, grinned, shook his head. He pinched himself several times on the forearm and said, "Ow. Ow. Ow."

Right. You could get killed raiding a bee-hive. Memory told him that a tor-o-don could safely raid a hive, the bees apparently getting caught in all that hair. Still, they must get stung on the eyes and nose, and on their exposed genitals... Another memory of the day before, the female bending over to drink, space around her bottom pink as a baboon's butt.

The bushes rustled and the two were on their feet, crouching, alert. This could be Ko-tan and his yo-band, following them, waiting to steal their catch. Om-at relaxed. Pan-sat and his friends, brothers Id-an and O-dan. They were a poor sort of group, Pan-sat so small and weak, Id-an with his crippled left arm, always carrying a stick around to make up for it, O-dan the biggest, but not very smart. They very seldom had a guest-gift to show for their efforts, but what else was a male to do with his time?

Om-at felt a sharp pang of pity for Pan-sat, remembering him bent over in the night, whimpering from Lu-don's attentions, only rarely approaching a Low Woman with some pitiful guest-gift of his own.

Strange notion: Lu-don never needed to bother with a guest-gift. He had Pan-sat, who didn't merit one.

The three came and squatted under the tree with them, silent. Here were both types of hunting group a waz-ho-don male could join, a three-member ad-yo, a two-member enen-yo. A single male could go out and hunt by himself, but it wasn't much fun.

Pan-sat kept staring at him, eyes seeming to wander around on his torso, looking at his big chest and shoulders, the fat bulges of muscle in his upper arms. Om-at

felt a sudden chill, wondering if Pan-sat imagined him as a substitute for Lu-don. He flinched when the man touched him on the thigh.

Pan-sat said, "Om-at. Ta-den. En. En." Lifting his hand with only the thumb and little finger extended. Looked around at his friends. "En? En? En?" A quick head-shake, then he folded his hand into a fist and lifted the three middle fingers. "Ad."

Well, yes. Enen. The fingers that did the most work. Ad. The three that made up the body of the hand. An enen-yo was usually better than an ad-yo, in any case.

Pan-sat gestured around at the countryside, taking in the whole world. "Guest-gift. Catch. Catch. Catch. Tor-o-don."

Hmh. Not quite like female speech, which tended to weld words right together, but close, probably a side-effect of his association with Lu-don. Om-at nodded. "Tor-o-don."

"Baby. Guest-gift. O-lo-a." Slight grin.

Om-at stiffened with anger but let it go. Pan-sat wasn't worth chastising. Lu-don would take care of that.

Pan-sat held up his open hand and said, "Adenen." The word males had been taught to use in place of the female magic word "hand."

Ta-den suddenly leaned forward and sniffed Pan-sat's fingers, Om-at wondering if they smelled of Lu-don. He said, "Adenen?" eyebrows lifted.

Pan-sat said, "Tor-o-don. Guest-gift. Adenen." "Adenen-yo."

Om-at looked at them doubtfully. Hunting bands were seldom known to cooperate, it just didn't do any good. They would only get in each other's way. But that sudden vision: The ad-yo going out and risking its collective neck trying to distract a big male tor-o-don while Om-at and Ta-den ran in and grabbed a couple of babies. That would be enough for an aden-en's worth of guest gifts.

Ta-den nudged Om-at in the ribs. "Adenen-yo." He smiled.

So be it.

In the late afternoon, despite hopeful planning, they came upon the tor-o-don family suddenly. There were seven of them sitting beside the stream, eating from a little pile of tubers and nuts and big seeds, drinking water from cupped hands, grunting and muttering to themselves, sounds of contentment, nothing like words. Two small females, four children of various sizes, a huge, burly male, made larger by his shaggy black coat, off to one side, glaring at nothing from under thick projecting brows.

Pan-sat squeaked with alarm when he popped out of the bushes, skidding to a stop. He turned, almost panicky, wanting to scuttle back into cover, but Om-at was right behind him, looking around, taking in the situation, barking a quick warning cry to the others, not words, just the old male sound for hunt-danger.

One of the females screamed, some tor-o-don cry, all heads turning, looking at the waz-ho-don, then the male was on his feet, snarling out a chattering warning, rushing toward them, arms outstretched, fists clenched.

Om-at shoved useless Pan-sat out of the way, barked Ta-den's name, and put his own fists up. The male was enormous, head and shoulders taller than Om-at,

second he must wrest a collection of scientific secrets plus their inventor and sundry impedimenta from a dungeon on a fleshpot world; and in the third rebuild morale among the occupants of a prison camp. The last works least well; despite Bujold's assertions to the contrary, it all seems a trifle too easy for him, and there's a notable lack of background – we're never told what the war is supposed to be about, only that Miles being the good guy is on one side, ergo the others must be the bad guys. Nonetheless, this collection is well worth the money – despite all appearances.

Pan have given the book a cheap cover illustration with no relevance to the text, and imposed thereon ugly and cluttered graphics. The book itself is printed on such cheap and nasty paper that the ink bleeds noticeably, and the design is bog standard. Bujold deserves a lot better, and at a fiver for a shortish A-format paperback, so do we.

In **Achilles Choice** by Larry Niven and Steven Barnes (Pan, £8.99) the world of 2044 is run by a Council of multinational monopolies according to the principles of (allegedly) benevolent fascism. Nation states are marginalized, with most individuals preferring allegiance to one or other of the corporations. With world peace and high living standards, it's the world of *Rollerball*, and the plot is much the same as well.

The Olympics have been restructured to reflect the corporate vision of the renaissance man/woman. All contenders must offer two sports, present a thesis, and do something "esthetic," this last being, like much else in the book, rather fuzzily defined; as it includes computer graphics and chess, one wonders what else may be acceptable. The maguffin is "Boost," a form of brain-surgery which enhances all aspect of mental and physical performance, and is not only permitted but encouraged, despite the disadvantage that after a maximum of eight years the autonomic nervous system goes chaotic, leading to rapid degeneration of body and mind, followed by death.

That is the choice which our heroine, Jillian Schomer, must make – but there's an out. If she can win a gold she will be given a Link, a satellite-controlled add-on built into the skull, which regulates the nervous system much as a governor regulates the action of a defective heart. Here's where credibility starts to unravel. Given the multiplicity of channels available, and the cheapness of cybernetic hardware, there seems no reason why all the best and brightest, if not the whole population, should not be given Boost plus Link as a matter of course. Since anyone's Link could be turned off centrally, with catastrophic

consequences, I can imagine no more effective means of social control. None of this is new: Murray Leinster thought of something on these lines in *The Last Spaceship* (1949), and the question of who gets chosen and who doesn't is exactly the sort that used to exercise J.T. McIntosh.

Niven and Barnes, by contrast, not only ignore these possibilities but signally fail to come up with a motive for the Council. All right, there are intrigues going on between the corporations, but this factor should encourage them to all to maximize rather than restrict the number of Boosted/Linked among their personnel. Moreover, the sad condition of losing contenders seems to arouse no sympathy among the populace. The spectacle of a superb and beloved silver medallist falling painfully and publicly apart for lack of what she could very easily be given is precisely the sort of unnecessary focus of unrest that a rational entrenched bureaucracy would go to great lengths to avoid, but the authors ignore this very obvious aspect as well.

And that's the problem with the whole book. Too little time and effort has gone into it, arousing the suspicion that if more had it would have been written very differently or abandoned altogether. At £8.99 for C-format, you don't get much book for your buck, either. Two hundred and fourteen pages sounds respectable, but the print is large, there are seventeen chapters, each on a fresh recto, plus twelve full-page illustrations, each with a blank behind. Though it's far too short for the society to be properly portrayed, no one at Tor (the U.S. publisher) seems to have read it. Had it been read, someone might have noticed that Jillian has short blonde hair (p.9), yet in Boris Vallejo's pictures it's always halfway down her back. Don't they even shave for brain surgery any more? The pictures are in India ink, which isn't Vallejo's best medium – he's much better with soft pencil. At that, Jillian's features vary from plate to plate, and no attempt has been made to represent the acromegaly of her coach, a silver medallist now well into borrowed time.

In short, no one cares very much, and since the authors don't seem to either, perhaps they're right not to. It's all a great shame: Niven can and has done so much better, and these are not his characteristic weaknesses. The great success of *Known Space* derived as much from its self-consistency as anything, but *Achilles' Choice* looks jerry-built. Barnes deserves the full attention of his senior collaborator, but it's not been forthcoming.

(Chris Gilmore)

Voices Prophesying War Kim Newman

The 1966 first edition of **Voices Prophesying War: Future Wars 1763-3749** by I.F. Clarke (Oxford University Press, 1992, £19.95), was subtitled "1763-1984," marking the span between the anonymous *Reign of King George VI*, which apparently inaugurated the "imaginary war" sub-genre, and Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949). As is demonstrated by the new sub-title, which is extended to commemorate the date in which the world again ends in Walter M. Miller's *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (1959), this welcome new edition is greatly revised and extended. Unusually for an academic, Clarke is as aware of events within the strict category of science fiction as within the greater progress of mainstream literature – although he displays a wide historical and political spectrum of interests entirely at odds with the tunnel-vision of all too many who have commented on the genre from within. On the strength of its old version, this easily as a classic, but the new, improved edition also makes it one of the most important recent contributions to the debate that rages about the exact purpose as prophecy or current commentary of Future Fictions.

Although Clarke starts with *The Reign of King George VI: 1900-1925*, which features a 20th-century European War of 1917-1920 fought on the principles of Frederick the Great, he swiftly overleaps a century of proto-science fiction (including a wonderful rash of paranoia stories about Napoleonic invaders surging through a Channel Tunnel) to get to Sir George Tomkyns Chesney's *The Battle of Dorking: Reminiscences of a Volunteer* (1871). This truly set the pattern for what was to come and established rules and regulations for a genre still being observed as recently as Sir John Hackett's *World War Three* (1978) and Whitley Strieber and James Kunetka's *Warday* (1984), not to mention (which Clarke doesn't) John Milius's film *Red Dawn* (1984).

Concerned at the post-Crimea state of the nation's defences, Chesney, who initially published his brief novel anonymously, outlined a near future in which Germany, having swiftly crushed France in the real world, sets its sights on Britain and successfully conquers the island kingdom, besting the stout-hearted but ineptly-managed defence forces with frightening efficiency. Chesney's master-stroke was to realize that warfare was changing, and to use an imaginative framework to illustrate just what the changes would